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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and evaluate the nature, scope, and implications of the rural development in the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The first section of the paper deals with the forces that have caused changes in agrarian reform policies as they affected rural development in these countries. Specifically discussed are the Agrarian Reform Law of 1958 in Iraq and Syria; the 1967 June War in Jordan and Lebanon; the 1952 revolution and Agrarian Reform Law in Egypt; the Cuban system of collective farming in Algeria; and the Five-Year Plan in Morocco and Tunisia. The evaluation section of the paper emphasizes the importance of accurate and extensive data on rural life, sufficient financial resources, skilled personnel, and coordinated efforts in the planning for development as being essential elements for sound agrarian reform. The summary indicates that the agrarian reform programs in the Arab countries have been successful in decreasing inequalities of wealth and narrowing traditional differences between the landlord and the peasant. However, with the migration of peasants to urban centers, the need exists for more economic development, social uplift, political stability, and effective governmental organization. (HBC)

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AGRARIAN REFORM POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB MIDDLE EAST*

One of the most important aspects of development, in any country, is the extension of benefits to a large number of individuals. Such a goal could be achieved through careful planning--through collective and concerted efforts that focus not only upon technological and physical resources but also upon social, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Such efforts are especially needed in the Third World, including the Arab world, which is afflicted with many rural problems. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and evaluate the nature, scope, and implications of the rural development in the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

With the exception of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, all Arab countries were once under foreign occupation. Most rural people were dominated by feudal landlords, and as a result rural development received very little attention. The newly independent Arab countries inherited many problems, such as the high degree of concentration in land ownership, a complicated system of share tenancy, an extreme degree of social stratification, and the peasants' low level of living. The difficult task for these countries is to overcome the hopelessness of the peasants and to improve rural conditions.

Iraq:

In Iraq as a result of the peasants' growing discontent, the government acted to improve their economic condition by allowing them to own

land (distributed by the government) in the Dujailah area (south-central Iraq) and by providing them with many services, especially schools, health care, and technical assistance. But only after the revolution of July 1958 did the landlords' influence begin to decline. In that year, the Agrarian Reform Law was inacted to raise the peasants' level of living as well as the standard of agricultural production. Farmers continue to establish agricultural cooperative associations, which are encouraged by the government. However, adult education in rural areas has received very little attention, and the Iraqi government's attempts to improve health conditions have been limited almost entirely to urban areas (Baali, 1966a: 178-179; Baali, 1966b: 39-45).

Syria:

A concentration of large farms, absentee ownership, and a low level of living among the peasants have also characterized independent Syria. Until 1958, reform programs emphasized the expansion of irrigation and land reclamation.

The Agrarian Reform Law of 1958 which dealt primarily with the expropriation and redistribution of land also encouraged the establishment of agricultural cooperatives through government loans and grants. In addition, both the First Five-Year Plan (1960-65) and the Second Five-Year Plan (1965-70) gave priority to agricultural development. As in Iraq, little attention has been given to fundamental education and other major institutional services.

Jordan and Lebanon:

In Jordan and Lebanon, most of the farms are small, owner-operated. The small number of large landowners does not constitute a serious problem

for rural development. The major development programs in both countries are centered on land reclamation and irrigation schemes.

The 1967 June War adversely affected Jordan's planning efforts, especially in the West Bank territory, now under Israeli occupation. The East Ghor project area has more than once been a target of Israeli shelling, which has kept many farmers from their fields.

Egypt:

Before its 1952 revolution, Egypt attempted to improve the peasants' living conditions through the establishment of rural social centers, which were to provide such necessary services as vocational guidance and maternity care. However, their success was limited by a shortage of experienced personnel and the objections of large landowners to some planned reforms.

In 1952 the Agrarian Reform Law was promulgated. Its objectives are similar to those in Iraq and Syria: to distribute landownership among the peasants, to eliminate the political dominance of the large landowners, to improve the living standard of the peasants, and to raise agricultural productivity. The law and its amendments have been generally effective in raising the living standard of the agricultural population. Because of its political stability "Egypt was much more sucessful in realizing the social and political objectives of land reform" (Al-Qazzaz, 1971: 174) than Iraq and Syria.

The high rate of population growth (approaching three per-cent per annum), accompanied by improvement in sanitation and health conditions, little migration, and limited fertile lands, may limit the success of Aswan Dam project in the long run.[1] Egypt, however, is determined to make fuller use of its vast desert which covers about 95 percent of its total area.

The Maghrib:

In Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, the majority of the peasants own small and fragmented plots of land and enjoy little facilities. As a result, the Algerian government introduced the Cuban system of collective farming through the amalgamation of small farms which are provided with the necessary facilities. The major problem for a short- or long-term plan for the Algerian agricultural population is how to deal with approximately eight million people who are dependent for their livelihood on less than three million hectares of fertile land.

In Morocco, the government also emphasizes the modernization of the traditional methods of agriculture. Its endeavor through the Five-Year Plan (1960-1965) to provide educational, technical, and social services did not prevent farmers from migrating to the cities which already suffer from a high rate of unemployment. The same situation is also true in Tunisia, though a major objective of its planning is to improve rural conditions (e.g., the Medjerda Valley Development).

Evaluation

Among essential elements for sound agrarian reform are: accurate and extensive data on rural life, sufficient financial resources, skilled personnel, and coordinated efforts in the planning for development and the execution of reform program. Consideration for the traditional patterns and local values of rural inhabitants, and their desire to participate in the planning for the development of their own communities also are important aspects of reform. Let us apply these aspects to the reform efforts in the Arab world:

1. The paucity of data on natural and human resources is appalling, which makes long-term planning and projections difficult.

2. The financial resources in most Arab countries are sufficient (for agents of change to carry out their plans). But these resources are not, at times, efficiently utilized. Moreover, most of the resources are spent lavishly on urban and industrial development and, following the 1967 June War, on defense.

3. There is not a sufficient number of skilled personnel to deal with agrarian reform. Qualified social scientist seldom participate in rural development planning. Many experienced individuals are appointed to positions which do not correspond to their orientation and experience. This is even true in advanced Lebanon, where "the lack of coordination between education and need has been carried to such an extreme that even government employees who are given scholarships for advanced training abroad often find, upon their return home, that no one-including the government—requires their newly acquired skill" (Klat, 1960: 60-61).

4. The instability of the governments in most of the Arab countries is an obstacle to effective coordination of reform programs among various departments.[2] Because of the frequent cabinet changes, few competent personnel remain long in their positions. Dismissal of experienced individuals because of their political beliefs is another repercussion. Thus, agrarian reform is shaped by political development but suffers from political instability.[3]

5. Since the agrarian reform is carried out by the state, the rural people seldom participate in planning efforts to improve their own communities.

6. An understanding of the impact that planned change will have on

people and their mode of life is essential to effective development. In the Arab world, people are generally bound by kinship ties and/or strong traditional patterns, and development programs must take this factor into account. In the case of governmental efforts to settle nomadic people on agricultural lands, cultural and psychological factors were seldom taken into account. The process should be one of transitional rather than radical change from nomadism to agrarianism, and such change should be undertaken only with the cooperation of the nomadic people (Tannous, 1947: 13-14). These are important and necessary conditions for planning: Bedouins despise professions and look down on men who depend for their livelihood on jobs and occupations, including farming (Wardi, 1966).

All in all, agrarian reform programs in the Arab countries have been successful in lessening inequalities of wealth and narrowing "traditional" differences between the landlord and the peasant. It must be noted that when an agrarian reform brings about radical change in the social structure, the reform is likely to encounter some obstacles. The resistance of large landowners—for example, in Iraq, Egypt, and Syria—to change in the rural power structure and to governmental efforts to eliminate the abuses of the feudal social order has contributed to social tension and conflict in the early stages of reform (Baali, 1968).

To sum up, almost two-thirds of the Arab population are ruralites, and their economy is predominantly agriculture. In spite of the tremendous economic and human potentialities, rural and agricultural problems are numerous. Many of the efforts in rural development are centered on improving the traditional methods of agriculture and irrigation facilities. Health, welfare, and educational services, including fundamental education, are minimal.

Poverty is predominant, and unemployment is rife. Because of these and other related reasons, peasants in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia have migrated to urban centers. This migration has had many repercussions, among the most significant of which is the cultural gap or conflict between the values and norms of the rural migrants and those of the established urban dwellers. The migrants are usually concentrated in a few localities, where they maintain their traditions, customs, and ethnocentric attitudes, a condition which sets them apart and delays the process of adjustment (see Phillips, 1959; Abu-Lughod, 1961; Baali,1966c). Hence, "the need for [more] economic development and social uplift is indeed great and urgent. Equally urgent is the need for political stability and more effective governmental organization" (Tannous, 1951: 2).

FOOTNOTES

* A condensed version.

1. The construction of the Aswan Dam has resulted in the flooding of the Wadi Halfa district in the Sudan. Hence the resettlement scheme at Khashm el-Girba, which is also a major objective of the Sudan's Ten-Year Plan (1961-1962--1970-1971). Some emphasis on education, health, and housing are also objectives of the plan.

2. In December 1964, the Moroccan Minister of Agriculture complained "about the waste and duplication of having three separate agencies engaged in similar activities" (American University: 1965:312). See also Eden and Snavely (1970:24).

3. In Iraq, for instance, the Agrarian Reform Law of 1958 has been amended at least 30 times (to be exact, 27 amendments as of December 7, 1966) (Baali, 1969:76).

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